

# **Community Empowerment through Social Inclusion**

Investigator: **Biswas, P.K.**

*Sponsored by:* **UNICEF**

The goal of this study was to assess the extent to which Village Planning (VP) and seven interventions and services, namely Integrated Child Development Services (ICDS) - anganwadi, immunisation, institutional delivery, Public Distribution System (PDS), National Rural Employment Guarantee Schemes (NREGS), primary education, and schemes that tackle malnutrition have been socially inclusive for Scheduled Castes (SCs) and Scheduled Tribes (STs).

The study found that interventions to be socially inclusive for SCs and STs. Schemes have generated new opportunities for these communities, and raised their knowledge of, reach and access to their services. Service delivery under the schemes has been by and large provided in a non-discriminatory way. Village Panchayat has prompted processes of participation, leading to more control over planning and decision-making for SCs and STs. These processes have empowered these social groups and increased their inclusion.

However, their impact is reduced by low quality of service provision, as well as problems with governance and implementation. To promote access, improvements in the supply side are needed. It is imperative that development workers in the village are made more accountable, processes become more transparent, and vigorous follow up is pursued if the interventions are to foster participation and improve livelihoods across social boundaries. In addition, more clarity with protocols, agenda and goals of village workers and community-based organisations, more coordination of activities between the different actors, and more capacity would improve the effectiveness of the schemes in regards to social inclusion.

Despite their efficiency at multiple levels, the interventions are not being successful in transforming underlying structures of social exclusion in society. Change is a slow, non-linear process, and in order to fully address social exclusion, more intrinsic forms of discrimination will have to be given special attention. Moreover, the gains produced by the schemes may be jeopardised if the interventions do not take into consideration a host of exogenous factors that confine SCs and STs to the bottom of the social ladder.